

# Development of a continuous professional development training module based on multicultural counselling competency for professional counsellors in Malaysia

Journal of Adult and Continuing Education  
0(0) 1–20

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DOI: 10.1177/1477971419896375

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study was to develop a continuous professional development training module based on multicultural counselling competency for professional counsellors in Malaysia. The research methodology comprised three phases: (i) training need assessment using survey method, (ii) module design and development and (iii) module evaluation using an experimental design. First, the Multicultural Counselling Competency Survey-Malaysian Counsellor Edition questionnaire was used to collect data from 116 professional counsellors from various work settings. The results clearly indicated the need for continuous professional development training to enhance counsellors' multicultural counselling competency. The development of the training module adopted Sidek's model, a Malaysian-based framework for module development. The developed training module was then evaluated for its effectiveness through analysing its content validity and reliability. Results revealed that the training module scored high content validity value of 77.2% (0.77) and satisfactory reliability level (alpha Cronbach's coefficient value of 0.75). The overall findings of the present research imply that the continuous professional development training module is necessary for enhancing multicultural counselling competency of Malaysian professional counsellors.

**Keywords**

Multicultural counselling competency, continuous professional development, multicultural counselling training, Malaysian professional counsellors, module development

**Introduction**

Malaysia is located in Southeast Asia with a population of over 30 million that includes 69.1% *Bumiputra* (i.e. Malays and indigenous groups), 23% Chinese, 6.9% Indians and the rest of the population are made up of other ethnic indigenous group (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2018). This element highlights the uniqueness and diversity of the country. At the same time, it is also a challenge for counsellors, especially because most Malaysian counsellors are Malay Muslims (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). Here, Malaysian counsellors are exposed to clients with

various cultural backgrounds, which indirectly becomes a barrier to the counsellors themselves. One of the main reasons is because of Malaysia's diverse religions and cultures (e.g. Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Sikhism and other religions) that express different beliefs and ways of life (Ibrahim, Jamil, & Yusof, 2013). Hence, without proper multicultural training, counsellors of a different culture may become judgemental towards certain beliefs or practices that are different from their own. For example, issues such as homosexuality, premarital and extramarital sex are generally perceived as culturally sensitive issues or taboo subjects in Malaysia. Therefore, clients are reluctant to talk about these issues during counselling sessions. Consequently, Malaysian counsellors facing these challenging circumstances must have high levels of multicultural counselling competence to prevent personal biases towards certain individuals (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Besides that, language barriers may also pose a challenge to Malay Muslim counsellors (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013). For example, some Chinese Malaysian clients prefer to speak in their mother tongue (Mandarin language) during counselling sessions. As most Malay-Muslim counsellors are only bilingual (speaks English and Malay), this language restriction is an obstacle for conducting effective counselling sessions. Here, they can learn a few commonly used Mandarin words or phrases to communicate better in counselling sessions. Moreover, some cultural issues such as caste system faced by Indian Malaysians splits the Indian community and causes equality issues. Malay-Muslim counsellors need to be aware about these issues to actively engage with their clients.

In Malaysia, counselling is still viewed as a new field in the mental health profession. It originally started in 1960s as a type of career guidance for high school students (Othman & Abdullah, 2015). Since then, it underwent rapid and drastic transformations through massive counselling movements within the nation. The counselling field has been diversified and are now being sought out by human resource managers, athletes, hospitals, police force (forensic) and educational sectors. As a result, the demand for counsel or education programs has substantially increased. Additionally, the Malaysian government has also showed support by providing formal training and education programs for trainee counsellors and novice counsellors. Nonetheless, there are concerns that the present educational and training programs lack multicultural focus. For instance, multicultural components are being separated and taught as one subject instead of being infused in all teaching and learning processes (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2017). As a result, many professional counsellors are lacking this important feature (multicultural competence).

## **The need for development of multicultural counselling competence module**

International literature posits that all mental health workers must be capable to provide effective services and be culturally sensitive to every member of society

who come from different cultural backgrounds (Dillon et al., 2016; Pelling, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2008). This statement implies that there is a need for multicultural counselling competency (MCC) in the education of counsellors and practice of counselling in multicultural contexts. The term MCC has been defined as a counsellor's (i) beliefs and attitudes regarding racial and ethnic minorities, the need to check biases and stereotypes and the development of a positive orientation towards multiculturalism; (ii) knowledge of one's own worldview, knowledge of cultural groups with whom one works and knowledge of socio-political influences on members of these groups and (iii) skills, strategies and interventions needed to work with minority groups within a cross-cultural counselling context (Sue et al., 1982).

Therefore, training programs designed specifically to increase multicultural counselling competence among professional counsellors are essential (Conner & Walker, 2017; Constantine, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). In a nutshell, as a counsellor, to be multiculturally competent is to be effective; it is not avoidable nor can we view it as an add-on or optional.

There are several reasons to explain the lack and decreasing level of counsellors' multicultural competency. First, there is a significant increase in the number of practicing counsellors and counsellor education programs (See & Ng, 2010). For instance, there are more than 20 counselling programs in higher education institutions in Malaysia (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2017). Hence, there is a difficulty in monitoring the quality of the programs. Although the Malaysian board of counsellors regularly reviews and updates its curriculum, the multicultural focus lacks depth and attention. The multicultural counselling subject is yet to be assessed objectively by lecturers and practicing counsellors. Besides that, the board should also engage with trainee counsellors and educators in order to receive constructive feedback on the curriculum. Though this is not directly related to multicultural counselling, this method will ensure that future graduates are of the highest standard and provide quality care to their wide range of clients.

Additionally, it is crucial to comprehend that counsellors can never master multiculturalism upon graduating from an undergraduate or graduate counselling course. It is a continual state of learning. For instance, attending various counselling training programs and taking on a greater number of diverse clients was empirically proven to increase counsellors' multicultural knowledge and competence (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2017). This means that by attending multicultural counselling trainings, they gain multicultural insights, increase knowledge base and stay updated on the latest trends. Nevertheless, sadly, there is a lack of multicultural training for practicing counsellors in Malaysia.

Moreover, there are more than 8000 registered counsellors in Malaysia (Zhafran, 2019). However, the opportunities in the counselling field are scarce, thus, not all of them are able to practice counselling. As a result, there are many counselling graduates that are unemployed or forced to venture in a different field (Zhafran, 2019). Here, higher education institutions need to implement stringent

entry requirements to ensure that only the highest quality students are enrolled in this program especially since the current supply has outnumbered the demand.

Today's clientele is very much different compared to the past decade. An increasing number of clients (including those from the minority population) are seeking mental health services which indicates that the stigmatisation surrounding mental health is decreasing and globalisation is increasing (Rickwood, Mazzer, & Telford, 2015). Also, the client population in Malaysia is increasingly diversified by its existence of foreign workers, travellers, expatriates, etc. Hence, professional counsellors must be well prepared to take on this challenge and provide effective services to their culturally diverse clients. Additionally, the curriculum of counselling programs in Malaysia has yet to represent this portion of the client population.

Besides that, advances in technology has also provided opportunities to clients to seek counselling service from an assortment of channels such as via phone, email, text and video conferencing (Rickwood et al., 2015). Online interventions are a significant advantage as access to mental health services becomes easily available and more affordable. Thus, this changing landscape denotes the need to train and prepare professional counsellors to work with culturally diverse clients.

In addition, issues brought by diverse clients may be more complex and may be influenced by cultural factors. Cultures do not only include ethnicity or cultures; they also include sexual orientation, economic status, age group, disability, etc. In Malaysia, demographic shifts are increasingly significant and are brought about by minority populations such as single mothers, pregnant teens and the economically disadvantaged (Suan, Ismail, & Ghazali, 2015). As such, it is also important to understand that culture influences clients' identity and life circumstances. This indicates that professional counsellors need to keep updated on the various types of minority groups available and be aware of their needs in order to effectively work with them.

Furthermore, as counsellors gain multicultural competence, they are able to effectively help more culturally diverse clients. At the same time, more clients from different backgrounds will be more open to seeking help from counsellors of different ethnicity. To sum up, continuous professional development (CPD) courses are necessary as part of the ongoing evolution of professional counsellors to comprehend and utilise suitable intervention strategies when dealing with culturally diverse clients. Therefore, this research aimed to probe into Malaysian counsellors' practice of multicultural counselling, develop a CPD-MCC training module and then, assess the reliability and validity of the module.

## **Methodology**

The following portion describes a detailed methodology of the present study.

### *Objectives of the present study*

This paper discusses the three phases of the development of the CPD-MCC training module. As a result, there are three research objectives in this paper:

1. Review the development needs of CPD-MCC training module.
2. Develop a CPD-MCC training module.
3. Assess the reliability and validity of the CPD-MCC module.

### *Research design*

Overall, this research used an exploratory mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The specific research design used to develop the CPD-MCC training module was based on Sidek's model, a Malaysian-based framework for module development (Sidek, 2001). While the development of the module's content is built around the multicultural counselling competence model proposed by Sue et al. (1992).

### *Phase 1: Assessing training and development needs of counsellors*

Phase 1 aims to investigate the need for the development of CPD-MCC training modules. There are three research questions in this phase:

1. What is the level of MCC of Malaysian counsellors?
2. What are the components of MCC that are required by Malaysian counsellors for CPD training?
3. Is there a significant difference in the scores of MCC of counsellors in Malaysia among (i) gender and (ii) registration of professional counsellors?

**Research method.** In order to answer the research questions in phase 1, researchers used a survey method to obtain an overview of the level of MCC of counsellors, as well as to define their specific needs for training in the aspect of MCC using a questionnaire.

**Sample.** The sample of the present study consists of 116 professional counsellors in Malaysia. Majority of the participants were female counsellors ( $n = 89$ ; 76.7%), while 27 were male participants (23.3%). In terms of ethnicity, majority were Malays ( $n = 98$ ; 84.5%) which is the dominant ethnic group of Malaysia, followed by Indians ( $n = 10$ ; 8.6%), Chinese ( $n = 6$ ; 5.2%) and others ( $n = 2$ ; 1.7%). Most of the counsellors participating in this study were in between the ages of 20 and 40 years old ( $n = 90$ ; 77.6%).

**Instrument.** In order to conduct this survey, the researchers used the Multicultural Counselling Competency Survey-Malaysian Counsellor Edition (MCCS-MCE: Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2011, 2017). The MCCS-MCE has 27 items ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ) divided

into five sub-scales; (i) Multicultural Understanding ( $\alpha=0.85$ ), (ii) Multicultural Knowledge ( $\alpha=0.75$ ), (iii) Micro-Culture Skills ( $\alpha=0.86$ ), (iv) Multicultural Awareness ( $\alpha=0.60$ ) and (v) Macro-Culture Skills ( $\alpha=0.83$ ). The MCCS-MCE measures participants' self-perceived MCCs when counselling clients in the Malaysian context. Example of questions includes 'At present, how would you rate your understanding regarding Malaysian culture?', 'Differences exist between my clients and myself regarding ethnicity and beliefs', etc. This questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale with higher score depicting a higher level of MCC (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2017).

**Findings.** As a whole, the participants level of MCC is moderate ( $M=3.23$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ). Participants had the highest mean score in the Multicultural Understanding component ( $M=3.92$ ,  $SD=0.71$ ) and Macro Culture Skills ( $M=3.56$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ). While the lowest mean score was obtained in Multicultural Awareness component ( $M=2.69$ ,  $SD=1.41$ ) and Micro Culture Skill component ( $M=2.93$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ). Here, Malaysian counsellors understand and are well aware of the macro cultural difference. However, they lack multicultural awareness and micro culture skills. For instance, they are aware of the general differences between different races but not the unique differences within one race (e.g. Kelantanese Malays and Johorean Malays vary in terms of food, dialect and certain cultural practice). Another issue is that Malaysian professional counsellors may not be aware of their personal biases, thus, there is a need for more training programs to help them become aware of this and keep their personal biases in check.

A total of 107 participants responded to the second research question, in which most of them responded 'Yes' ( $n=91$ ; 85.0%), indicating that they need CPD training based on components of MCC. They had also provided detailed information on the components of MCC they need to improve based on a five-point Likert scale, 1 = extremely unnecessary to 5 = extremely necessary. The results indicated that participants were most concerned with increasing their multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills.

In terms of the third research question, an independent t-test was conducted to compare MCC means of female and male participants. The results showed no significant difference in MCC scores among men ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=0.95$ ) and women ( $M=3.15$ ,  $SD=0.84$ );  $t(116)=1.66$ ,  $p=0.10$  (two-tails). Hence, this indicates that there is no reported differences of multicultural competencies among genders.

In addition, the results of the independent t-test showed significant differences in MCC scores among registered counsellors ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=0.84$ ) and non-registered counsellors,  $M=2.92$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ;  $t(116)=3.24$ ,  $p=0.002$  (two-tailed). The level of perceived MCC of registered counsellors is higher than that of counsellors who are not registered with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. This is probably because the Malaysian Board of Counsellors ensures that all registered professional counsellors abide by the ethical guidelines and regulations set.



This finding provides support for the need for practicing counsellors to register themselves with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. This is because registering with the Malaysian board of counsellors allows potential clients to recognise the credibility of the counsellor and to recommend counselling practices to others. Most importantly, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors provides and recommends continuous development programs for their members in order to further improve counsellors' skills, knowledge and intervention strategies. Additionally, it is a form of networking in which professional counsellors can meet and share their knowledge and experience with each other.

### *Phase 2: Designing and developing the CPD-MCC training module*

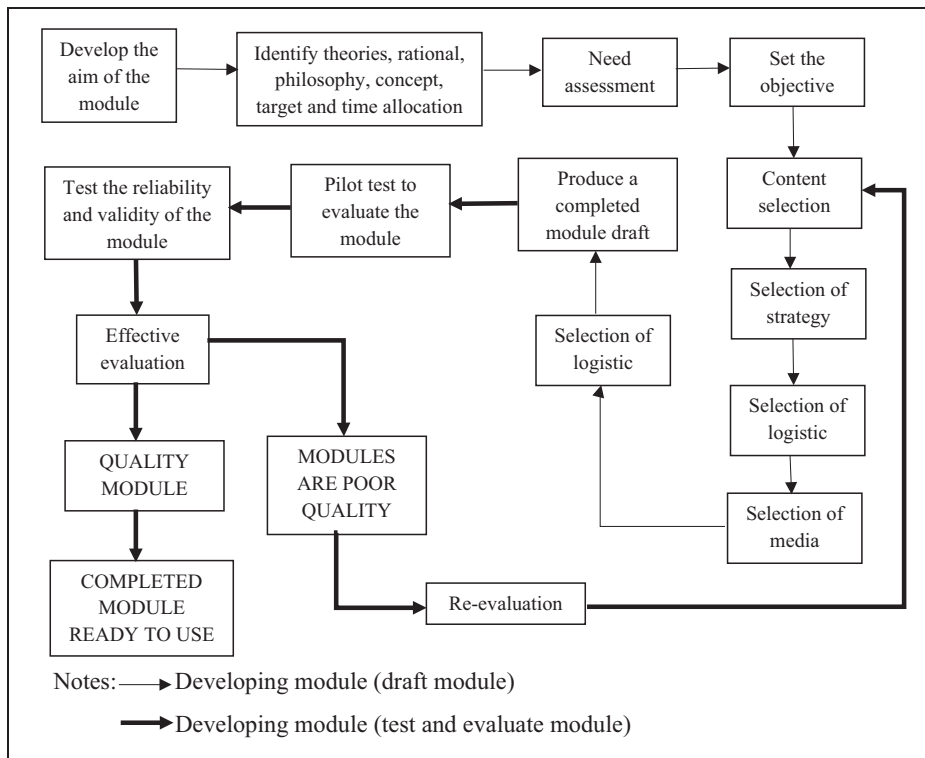
The module creation model proposed by Sidek (2001), a Malaysian-based framework for module development, was used in order to develop an effective and systematic module. The steps that were taken in the development process of the CPD-MCC module are summarised in Figure 1. This comprehensive model was selected because it proposes a systematic technique in the development procedure and for the testing of its reliability and validity (Mahfar, Noah, & Senin, 2019).

The CPD-MCC training module was developed to assist in increasing the level of multicultural counselling competence (MCC) among Malaysian professional counsellors and counsellor trainees. It includes 12 units and 19 activities that need a total of three consecutive days to execute. The total duration of time for the module is 24 h. It can be taught in a classroom setting and it is catered for participants aged  $\geq 18$  years old. The learning process includes individual participations and group interactions that involve problem-solving exercises and focus groups.

**Content development.** A comprehensive and effective development of a module must be founded on a theory. For the present research, the researchers used the renowned MCC matrix model by Sue et al. (1992) as their foundation, especially in terms of the structure, content and order of activities. The primary objectives of the CPD-MCC training module are to (i) increase the awareness of self and the various cultures of clients within the society; (ii) increase the understanding of multicultural counselling; (iii) develop a multicultural counselling strategy that is sensitive to the client's culture and needs; (iv) increase the understanding of beliefs and attitudes towards cultural diversity; (v) increase knowledge in multicultural counselling and (vi) increase macro and micro skills in multicultural counselling practice.

The MCC matrix model is significant as it is the cornerstone of the strength of the CPD-MCC training module. The MCC model stands on the formula of  $3 \text{ (characters)} \times 3 \text{ (dimensions)}$ . The three characters consist of (i) awareness about one's assumptions, values and biases; (ii) understanding the cultural world-view of various clients; (iii) developing appropriate techniques and intervention strategies. While, the three dimensions consist of (i) beliefs and attitudes,





**Figure 1.** Sidek's module development model.

Source: Mahfar et al. (2019) and Noah and Ahmad (2005).

(ii) knowledge and (iii) skills. Through this matrix formula, nine primary competencies had been recognised (Lee, 2008; Minami, 2008; Sue et al., 1992; Wendt & Gone, 2011). From the 9 main competencies, 31 sub-competencies were developed (9 competencies for beliefs and attitudes, 11 competencies for knowledge and 11 competencies for skills (Lee, 2008; Minami, 2008)). Hence, to form sub-modules for CPD-MCC training module, the researchers used an arrangement of these dimensions of multicultural competence and characters of multicultural counselors. When developing each activity, the researchers used the 31 sub-competencies as their foundation. Table 1 illustrates the framework of the newly developed CPD-MCC training module.

### *Phase 3: Evaluating content validity and reliability of the CPD-MCC training module*

For the third phase, the researchers used a quantitative approach via the distribution of questionnaire to participants. This questionnaire is the instrument used to

Table 1. CPD-MCC training module framework.

MCC matrix model by Sue et al. (1992)	CPD-MCC training module	Activities	Contents
3 Characters × 3 Components = 9 Competencies	1. Introduction	1. Recognise your culture	An introductory activity to participants to know and be aware of your own culture as well as recognising the background and the culture of other participants.
-9 Beliefs and attitude	2. Multicultural Beliefs & Attitude	2. Lecture	A brief lecture to prepare the participants to carry out the activities in unit 2 (Multicultural Beliefs & Attitude).
-11 Knowledge		3. Me, you and her	An activity to enhance the level of beliefs and attitudes of different cultures of the participants based on existing prejudices and stereotypes, and the effects of these two elements in cultural diversity.
-11 Skills		4. Cultural differences	A simulation activity to enhance the multicultural beliefs and attitudes among participants through experience and awareness of socio-cultural development, the difference between cultural groups and cultural influences on human behaviour.
= 31 Multicultural counselling competencies	3. Multicultural Knowledge	5. Lecture Question and answer Quiz	A lecture on multicultural counselling with question and answer session. Next, participants were given a short quiz on multicultural counselling.
	4. Multicultural Counselling Generic Skills	6. Lecture	A brief lecture to prepare the participants to carry out the activities in unit 4 (Multicultural Counselling Generic Skills).

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

MCC matrix model by Sue et al. (1992)	CPD-MCC training module	Activities	Contents
		7. Tell me	A role play activity of a counselling session which focuses on the difference between counsellors and clients in terms of ethnicity and race.
5.	Specific Cultural Skills	8. Do not get me out	A role play activity of counselling sessions focusing on the differences between counsellors and clients in terms of cultural components such as gender, religion, language, level of education and so on.
6.	Multicultural Counsellor Self-Awareness	9. Cultural people	An activity based on the 'RESPECTFUL' feature that aims to raise participants' awareness of their own culture. The implementation of this activity is based on participants' experience.
		10. You know me?	This activity is a continuation of the previous activity of 'Cultural people'. It is an activity to know about yourself through the views of others. The use of interview methods can train participants to communicate with different cultures.
7.	Awareness of Multicultural Clients and Communities	11. My client	A labelled card game aimed at building awareness of participants towards the diversity of clients' cultures.

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

MCC matrix model by Sue et al. (1992)	CPD-MCC training module	Activities	Contents
8.	Multicultural Understanding	12. My country	A collage activity carried out via group work. Through this activity, the participants will share experiences to revisit the diversity of cultures within the current society and to create awareness of the diversity of these cultures. This collage activity was chosen because it is among the best methods in promoting creativity to think critically in a larger scope and to create awareness of the differences that exist in a multicultural society.
		13. I am better	A debate activity in which the proposer and opposition party will defend a cultural issue. This activity will give participants an understanding of the differences between bias, racism, discrimination, stereotyping, etc. that may affect them individually and through their work. This urges them to recognise their own prejudices, beliefs and emotions.
		14. Cultural BINGO	A game activity that urges participants to exhibit their understanding and knowledge of various cultures as well as reinforce positive feelings regarding distinct cultural norms, traditions and customs.

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

MCC matrix model by Sue et al. (1992)	CPD-MCC training module	Activities	Contents
9.	Multicultural Strategies Development	15.	Notebook
		A group work activity in which groups are required to produce notebooks that contain issues and methods that are appropriate in developing multicultural strategies based on several features of multicultural counselling competencies.	
		16.	Preventing suicide
		A role play counselling session based on a unique counselling case (Meena) aimed at increasing participants' skills in the practice of multicultural counselling.	
		17.	Challenge
10.	Practical of Multicultural Counselling (1)	A group discussion activity in analysing multicultural counselling cases.	
		18.	My experience
11.	Practical of Multicultural Counselling (2)	A group work activity to develop an actual multicultural counselling case based on participants' experience. Role play activities are also performed to train participants to conduct effective counselling sessions from the counselling case(s) discussed.	
		19..	Reflection
12.	The End	A group activity for participants to share experiences and opinions on topics and activities that have been conducted.	

CPD-MCC: continuous professional development training module based on multicultural counselling competency.

evaluate content validity of the present module that is based on Jamaludin's (2002) research which is an adaption of Russell (1974) guide to module development. Four PhD qualified and experienced lecturers were invited to evaluate the contents of the CPD-MCC training module. The four experts were selected due to their extensive experience (more than 10 years) and expertise in the field of counselling, psychology, module development, multicultural counselling and education. They were in between the ages of 40 and 55 years old.

Each expert was provided with a version of the completed MCC module that consist of an introduction to the research, the manual to the module, relevant appendices and a questionnaire of the content validity based on the recommendations of Russell (1974) on the required conditions of content validity of a module summarised in Table 2. The questionnaire includes a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). A blank space was also provided in the questionnaire for the evaluators to provide suggestions or feedback regarding the module. Consequently, the researchers only needed to amend a few minor grammatical errors that were pointed out by the evaluators.

In order to establish the validity of the contents of the module, the raw data were computed by dividing the total scores of the individual experts' ratings by the

**Table 2.** Content validity of the CPD-MCC training module.

No.	Statements	Content validity (%)	Experts' assessment
1.	The contents of this module meet the required multicultural counselling competence for professional counsellors	75.0	Accepted
2.	The content of this module is suitable for the target population	82.5	Accepted
3.	The environment of the module implementation is satisfactory	80.0	Accepted
4.	The contents of this module are suitable to be implemented	77.5	Accepted
5.	The contents of this module are suitable with its proposed duration of time	80.0	Accepted
6.	The contents of this module are capable of increasing multicultural counselling attitude and beliefs	72.5	Accepted
7.	The contents of this module are capable of increasing multicultural counselling knowledge	77.5	Accepted
8.	The contents of this module are capable of increasing multicultural counselling skills	72.5	Accepted
	Overall content	77.2	Accepted

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overall score of the rating. The calculated value based on this process will stress the level of validity of a research module, and the content validity is considered high if the value is  $>70\%$  (Sidek & Jamaludin, 2005).

Table 2 summarises the percentage value of the entire validity of the content based on the eight statements regarding the module. The table also presents the overall MCC training module's content validity value which is  $77.2\%$  and is regarded as high. It comfortably exceeds the endorsed threshold value of  $70\%$ . The content validity value based on each component of validity is in between  $72.5\%$  to  $82.5\%$ . Accordingly, the conditions recommended by Jamaludin (2002), which was an adaption from Russell (1974) guide that had been used by the researchers for the module development, were strongly validated. Therefore, the findings of the present study reveal that the overall content validity of this module is high and can be applied to the targeted population.

Moreover, Pallant (2013) asserts that the minimum number of respondents for a pilot test is 20. Therefore, the process of testing the reliability of the CPD-MCC training module included 25 counsellor trainees (aged 19–24 years) in a public university in Malaysia. The counsel or trainees underwent the pilot test for the complete 12 sessions. To test the value of reliability of the CPD-MCC training module, a set of reliability questionnaire had been developed. This set of questionnaires is developed based on the module's activities (Jamaludin & Sidek, 2001). The items consist of 100 questions which were developed based on three subscales of MCC Matrix model which were multicultural beliefs and attitudes, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills. The questionnaire consists of a 10-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Examples of the items include 'I am more aware of my culture after the recognize your culture activity', 'I am now aware of my body language exhibited after the tell me activity', and 'I can recognize by personal biases based on the me, you and her activity'.

Subsequently, this questionnaire was answered by the participants after completing each session. A blank space was also provided in the questionnaire for the participants to provide suggestions or feedback regarding the module. Here, the participants only stated positive comments about the module, thus, the researchers did not need to make any changes to it. The responses to the questionnaires were then analysed using SPSS software. As a whole, the alpha Cronbach's coefficient value is 0.75. This shows that the CPD-MCC training module has an acceptable reliability value (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005; Mohamed, 2000; Valette, 1977). The researchers also further enhanced the reliability of the module by ensuring that (i) the facilitators received sufficient training and have mastered the module before the implementation of the pilot test, (ii) the facilitators fully adhere to the instructions of the module and (iii) a summary of each activity of the module is presented to the participant (student) of the pilot test before progressing to the next topic (Mahfar et al., 2019).



## **Discussion**

When developing the CPD-MCC training module which is based on the MCC matrix model, the researchers first extensively reviewed relevant literature on MCC especially in terms of theoretical concepts and methods that were established by Sue et al. (1992). Through the information obtained by the literature review conducted, the researchers developed the module that comprises 12 units and 19 activities. From a theoretical and practical viewpoint, these findings will have a profound impact on the current body of knowledge involving multicultural counselling and psychology.

Moreover, for an impact to be more significant, the module's content validity will need to be verified prior to its adoption. This notion is best echoed by Sidek and Jamaludin (2005). According to them, there are two essential features that represent the merit of a newly developed module which are content validity and reliability. Among these two, content validity is the most significant aspect in establishing the strength of the construct built into the module. In general, attaining a high content validity is tough as a newly developed module requires a comprehensive review on related literature (Shah, Bakar, Ahmad, & Jais, 2013). By using this method, a module can be effectively developed to suit the needs of a specific segment of a society (e.g. professional counsellors or student groups). In light of this specific condition, the researches embraced eight relevant conditions as outlined by Jamaludin (2002). Thereafter, the content validity of the module was appraised by four expert panels along with the eight determinants of relevancy. Consequently, the results of this appraisal showed that group guidance module has high content validity, built upon the unanimous, unequivocal agreement of all experts involved. Hence, this module can successfully assist practitioners when dealing with counsellors' multicultural counselling competencies.

The advantages of the CPD-MCC training module are further improved by its efficiency in accomplishing short-term goals and by its innate nature of obtaining instantaneous feedback from practicing counsellors. Nonetheless, when implementing a training program using the CPD-MCC module, the organisers of the program must ensure that it is being delivered by an experienced and competent professional counsellor in order to maximise effectiveness. This is because adult learners prefer trainers with knowledge, respect, applied experience within the same field, possess clear communication skills, are fair and understanding (Phillips, Baltzer, Filoon, & Whitley, 2017). It is also envisioned that this module (when used pertinently and sensibly) will assist the target participants to attain heightened levels of multicultural counselling competence.

## **Limitations of the research**

There are concerns in regards to the limitations of self-report instruments used during phase 1 of the present study. This is because self-report measures make it difficult to discern whether the participants' actual attitudes and behaviours are

being reported or if the participants may have been prompted regarding the researcher's intent. Self-report measures also raise concerns of social desirability bias. Moreover, the sample size of the present study was moderate which limits its generalisability. Additionally, the research's sample consisted mostly Malay (76.7%) professional counsellors, which again limits the generalisability to other ethnic groups within Malaysia. The final limitation is that all the experts invited to develop and review the module were located in West Malaysia (only one geographical area). This was because these experts were renowned practicing counsellors especially in the field of multicultural counselling.

## **Recommendations and implications for future research**

Based on the findings above, the content validity and reliability of the present module is satisfactory. It is proposed for future researchers to conduct an experimental research to study the effectiveness of this module on professional counsellors in Malaysia. Besides that, this training module can also be used to test its effectiveness in different job settings (e.g. hospitals, organisations, non-governmental organisations, welfare centres and schools). Additionally, this module can also be used to improve the existing educational courses at universities. For example, the Malaysian counselling education curriculum can be revised to include this module. This ensures that student counsellors will be multiculturally competent before graduating.

This module can also be promoted to counselling practitioners in developing continuous training programs. Here, more studies are to be carried out on a greater scale within the Malaysian context. Training professional counsellors (continuously) to improve their multicultural competence will only benefit the nation as a whole while ensuring that clients receive high quality counselling services. This will further strengthen the mental health of Malaysian citizens and help the nation achieve a universal cultural sensitivity equivalent to international standards. The main benefit of this module is driven by its effectiveness of achieving short-term goals of increasing the multicultural competency (skills, knowledge and awareness) among the participants. It is hoped that this module will be accepted by stakeholders (i.e. policy makers, educators, counsellor practitioners, researchers, course coordinators and Malaysian Board of Counsellors) to foster a high level of multicultural competency in counselling practices within the nation.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has revealed that the CPD-MCC training module (that is based on the MCC matrix model) can be applied on the target population (professional Malaysian counsellors). Furthermore, this module has been validated and is considered to have sufficient content validity and reliability. Hence, this module can act as a catalyst for future researches to conduct more studies on multicultural counselling and MCC. Lastly, the present study encourages practitioners to take

on a similar approach when developing a diverse range of training modules that involves the enhancement of MCC among professional counsellors, benefitting the counselling profession and the Malaysian society as a whole.

### Acknowledgements

This study is an extension of the first author's doctoral research project. She has been granted permission to conduct this research from the Malaysia Board of Counselors or locally known as Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia. The funding body for this study is Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS, FP027-2016) from Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education for research related expenses.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was funded by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS, FP027-2016) from Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education for research related expenses.

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